

PRESS RELEASE



Nikita Kadan

Photo: Gostomel. From artist's visual diary, 2023
Courtesy the artist



Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes

Desastres de la Guerra (Disasters of War), 1810-1815

Collection Fondazione Francesco Federico Cerruti per l'Arte

Long-term loan

Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli-Torino

Artists in a Time of War.

From Francisco Goya to Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso, Lee Miller, Zoran Mušič, Alberto Burri, Fabio Mauri, Bracha L. Ettinger, Anri Sala, Michael Rakowitz, Dinh Q. Lê, Vu Giang Huong, Rahraw Omarzad and Nikita Kadan

Curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and Marianna Vecellio

15 March - 19 November 2023

This new exhibition of over 140 works by 30 artists – including major new commissions of work by Ukrainian and Afghan artists – takes over the entire top floor of Castello di Rivoli and is curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and Marianna Vecellio. *Artists in a Time of War. From Francisco Goya to Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso, Lee Miller, Zoran Mušič, Alberto Burri, Iri and Toshi Maruki, Fabio Mauri, Bracha L. Ettinger, Anri Sala, Michael Rakowitz, Dinh Q. Lê* (with works by among others *Le Lam, Phan Oanh, Nguyen Thu, Truong Hieu, Nguyen Toan Thi, Kim Tien, Quach Phong, Huynh Phuong Dong, Minh Phuong*), *Vu Giang Huong, Rahraw Omarzad and Nikita Kadan*. The exhibition presents important works by artists who have experienced or are experiencing war. Their works express empathy and complexity, unease but also great humanity.

Artists in a Time of War includes loans from important Italian and international public and private institutions, as well as two new commissions, created for the occasion by the Afghan artist Rahraw Omarzad (Kabul, 1964), and the Ukrainian artist Nikita Kadan (Kiev, 1982).

The exhibition features art of the past and present, including Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes' *Desastres de la Guerra* (Disasters of War), 1810-1815, and develops the theme of war and post-traumatic subjectivity through historical works and new projects by leading contemporary artists. The itinerary highlights the practices of Omarzad, artist and key figure of the Afghan cultural scene, who found asylum in Italy and Germany, and Kadan, an artist who lives between Kiev and Bucha. Both artists offer a message of great emotional and human, as well as social and political impact. Originating from war-torn countries and scenes of profound geopolitical turmoil, they reflect on the importance of finding narratives of care and peace through creative expression.

THE THEME

“Recent international conflicts have led us to create a new exhibition that investigates the meaning of war,” says director **Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev**, “to ask ourselves how some particularly empathetic human beings – artists – process the organized violence of war, with its armies and tactics. They highlight its horror and its inexplicability, suspended as it is between rational calculations, on the one hand, and utter unpredictability on the other. In a series of artworks from the past and present, including some new commissions created by artists experiencing war today, this exhibition aims to open a discussion about war that extends beyond its political and economic explanation as a struggle for power, beyond its condemnation, beyond its justification as a necessary lesser evil. Instead, this exhibition seeks to look at war from a cultural perspective that includes art and philosophy. For the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Heraclitus, Being is revealed in war, Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι (*polemos pantōn men patēr esti* - war is the father of all things.) The French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas, after the Second World War, which he spent mainly in a German prison camp, reminds us that Being reveals itself to philosophical thought as war: in the contrast between the finitude of death - most evident in war - and the limitless incommensurability of existence. Life during wartime is this expanded interval between life and death. Through art, some artists in a time of war find a way remove themselves from adversarial thinking and to infinitely expand time and space, even in everyday life.”

According to **Francesca Lavazza**, President of the Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, “This exhibition, the last of the exhibition series *Espressioni*, which we have developed over recent years, summons a profound reflection on the contemporary world, thanks to the work of the artists who have been able over the centuries to express the discontinuity of the present and of conflict, interpreted through their personal sensitivity within the time they were living. The exhibited works thus manage to shake the public on controversial and difficult issues, representing the horrors of war, relevant to all conflicts. I thank Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and Marianna Vecellio for this courageous project intended to make the collective conscience reflect.”

ARTISTS IN A TIME OF WAR: A WALKTHROUGH

The exhibition begins in the **atrium on the top floor of the historic royal residence**, with a selection of archival photographic images from the Collections of the GAM - Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Torino, depicting the city destroyed by bombing during the Second World War (1939–1945). The photographs are exhibited together with the sculpture by **Ettore Ximenes** (Palermo, 1855 - Rome, 1926) *Il bacio di Giuda* (The Kiss of Judas), 1884, seriously damaged in the air raids of the allied armies in 1942 and for this reason installed with the box containing its fragments. This space also displays the work of **Iri and Toshi Maruki** (Iri Maruki: Hiroshima, 1901–1995 / Toshiko Amakatsu Maruki: Chippubetsu, Hokkaido, 1912 - Hiroshima, 2000), which bears witness to the effects of the nuclear explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



Partner

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In **Gallery 34**, the Spanish War of Independence (1808–1814) forms the backdrop to *Desastres de la Guerra* (Disasters of War), 1810–1815, first edition 1863, by **Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes** (Fuendetodos, 1746–Bordeaux, 1828), the famous cycle of 83 engravings made in the period marked by the conflict with the French Napoleonic invaders, from the Museum's Cerruti Collection. Goya's close-ups of tortured and maimed bodies and faces are set up in dialogue with the works of the Slovenian artist **Anton Zoran Mušič** (Bocavizza, 1909 – Venice, 2005) who in the 1930s had had the opportunity to admire and study the works of Goya in Madrid. Mušič is one of the few modern artists to have experienced firsthand the horror of the Second World War. Interned in the Dachau camp in November 1944 because he had refused to enlist in the SS in the Veneto. Mušič made a series of drawings in Dachau in the spring of 1945, which will be on display here, in addition to a large number of works from the series *Nous ne sommes pas les derniers* (We Are Not the Last.)

In the same **Gallery 34** is the premier of the most recent painting by the artist and psychoanalyst **Bracha L. Ettinger** (Tel Aviv, 1948), *Medusa - Rachel - Pieta*, 2017–2022, from which hallucinated faces but also profound beauty emerge. Born shortly after the war and the daughter of Polish Jewish Holocaust survivors, Ettinger was in the midst of her compulsory military service in a helicopter squadron of the airforce when the Six-Day War broke out in 1967 between Israel and neighboring countries - Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Three months after the end of the 6-days War, now based in El Arish, in the absence of any senior officer, soldier Bracha took the initiative alone to initiate, organize, and then to command, a major rescue operation that saved more than 152 young navy soldiers from the sea following the sinking shipwreck of INS "Eilat", and she herself was wounded during the night when a helicopter caught fire and collapsed in her direction. This traumatic experience caused partial amnesia. Even though she was painting from an early age, only after years of psychoanalytic practice, first as patient, then an analyst, Ettinger developed a style of intimist painting on the themes of transgenerational historical memory and the surfacing of personal obliterated memory; enigmatic paintings in the face of the unfathomable mystery of war and its traces. Today Ettinger is among the most respected feminist artists and theorists and is also known for her collaborative activities with Palestinians in support of a just and peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflicts.

The Second World War is also explored in **Gallery 35** through a selection of works placed in dialogue with the painting *Tête de femme* (Woman's Head), 1942, by **Pablo Picasso** (Malaga, 1881 – Mougins, 1973) made in the midst of the war and which derives in part from the famous painting *Guernica*, 1937, with which it shares the use of a palette of blacks and grays. The mangled and divided face of the figure of Dora Maar, probable subject of the portrait, also resembles female figures depicted in Picasso's famous large canvas *Guernica*, painted in the spring 1937 in memory of the tragic aerial bombing of the Basque town by the Nazi-fascist air force on April 26, 1937. Books with rare and unique bindings by Pierre-Lucien Martin from the Cerruti Collection *Solidarité. Poème*, 1938, and *Au rendez-vous allemand*, 1944, by the French surrealist poet **Paul Éluard** (Saint-Denis, 1895 – Charenton-le-Pont, 1952) are also on exhibit. *Solidarité* was published in April 1938 with a set of seven aquatints and etchings by anti-fascist artists, including Picasso, Joan Miró and Yves Tanguy. The volume, whose sales proceeds supported the republican fighters of the Spanish Civil War, opens with the poem *November 1936*, considered by critics to be the first poem of an explicitly political nature by the French writer. The poem was composed in the aftermath of the bloody Battle of Madrid, which took place between 8 and 23 November 1936. *Au rendez-vous allemand* is a collection of poems published in December 1944. It contains, among others, the poem *La Victoire de Guernica*, composed by Éluard a few weeks after the dramatic bombing of the Basque town. The drawings that Picasso made on the theme for the large canvas in preparation for the International Exhibition in Paris inspired the poet to draft the text. This volume from the Museum's Cerruti Collection is distinguished by the presence of an autograph version by the poet: it is *Les Vainqueurs d'hier périront* (Yesterday's victors will perish) a poem composed on 14 April 1938, whose verses portray the image of a Spain martyred by the Civil War.

In the same Gallery 35 there is also the painting by **Salvador Dalí** (Figueres, 1904–1989), *Composition avec tour* (also entitled *Sketch for scene curtain of "Café de Chinitas"*), 1943 ca. One of the best-known Surrealist artists to have painted the disasters of the Spanish Civil War and isolated, autarchic Spain during World War II, Dalí created "critical-paranoiac" works in the form of desolate, dreamlike Spanish landscapes.



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This painting is a sketch for one of the stage curtains that he made for the dance production of his friend known as “La Argentinita”, the famous dancer and choreographer Encarnación López Júlvez (Buenos Aires, 1898 – New York, 1945), when she staged the premiere of her opera-ballet *El Café de Chinitas* in 1943 at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. The ballet was based on songs by another great friend and traveling companion of Dalí, Federico Garcia-Lorca, inspired by Spanish folk songs. La Argentinita, a republican, had fled from Spain to the United States in 1936. Her choreography, created during the war, was a hymn to the joy and freedom of the world before Franco’s dictatorship when Spanish artists and intellectuals such as Dalí, Garcia-Lorca, Picasso and other Spanish artists and intellectuals, used to meet at the popular Café Teatro Chinitas of Malaga, known as the cradle of Flamenco since the mid-1800s. The elements of the painting are full of references to the situation in Europe in 1943: crossed by a central wall, the painting presents, on the right, a scene of ruins against a metaphysical background of Italian rationalist architecture and a blue star which, in addition to depicting the sign of the café, could allude to the Jewish star, suggesting the persecution of European Jews at the time. On the left side of the painting, a red flag hangs, a symbol of revolutionary socialism which at that time was allied against Fascism.

A part of Gallery 35 is dedicated to the story of **Alberto Burri** (Città di Castello, 1915 – Nice, 1995), one of the leading Italian artists of the twentieth century whose unprecedented investigation of new materials in his pioneering abstract art, revolutionized the artistic language in the post-war period. Trained as a doctor, he served in the Italian Army in North Africa where he was taken prisoner and transferred to the United States. During his imprisonment in the POW (Prisoners of War) camp in Hereford, Texas, from 1943 to 1946, he decided to abandon the medical profession to devote himself exclusively to art. In the Hereford camp there were numerous Italians who were writers, artists and craftsmen, and it is possible that the idea of dedicating himself to art originated from them. The exhibition presents Burri’s very first painting, the oil on canvas *Texas*, 1945, one of the few works created during his time in the prison camp that he brought back to his native town of Città di Castello in Italy. This work is foundational, although it does not belong to the artist’s mature period, which he dated to around 1948. The almost abstract red and ochre landscape is dense with pictorial matter and, along a high horizon line, a passing train can be seen, while in the foreground there is a stream of water and in the center a few elements including the fence of the camp, a barracks, a weather-vane on top of a trellis (typical of Texas where the pumps of the artesian wells were powered by wind with mills that also predicted windstorms) and two solitary trees. The diagonal structure of the lines gives movement to the composition in which the landscape and human nature meet in a deep but energetic solitude, in limbo, waiting for the distant war to end. Alongside *Texas*, two *Sacchi* by Burri from the early 1950s are on display, *Sacco e rosso* (Sack and Red), 1954, from the Cerruti Collection, and *Sacco* (Sack), 1954, from the Magnani Rocca Foundation. These are expressions of the artist’s dazzling certainty that the material itself, the jute, torn and stitched back together like a body after a trauma, can express without narrative, without figuration, the absolute reality and otherness of the experience of being there.

In the same gallery, there are also military photographic exhibits taken from magazines of the time, which make up the conceptual work *Linguaggio è guerra* (Language Is War), 1974, by **Fabio Mauri** (Rome, 1926–2009). Shocked by the discovery of the Holocaust, the Italian artist was interned in an asylum immediately after the war and until the early 1950s in the throes of mystical crises. Starting in the late 1950s, he developed an art based on the investigation of beauty, evil, ideology and power. In *Linguaggio è guerra*, he reflected in the early 1970s on the relationship between the ideological manipulation of language and war in general.

The gallery also presents the black and white photographs of **Elizabeth (Lee) Miller** (Poughkeepsie, 1907 – Chiddingly, 1977), a surrealist photographer who was a student of Man Ray and who later became a fashion photographer, as well as a reporter. During the Second World War she became an acclaimed war correspondent for *Vogue* magazine, accompanying the American army in Germany and thus documenting the first entry into the concentration camps of Buchenwald and Dachau. In this exhibition, for the first time, Lee Miller’s photographs of Dachau can be compared with Mušič’s drawings and testimonies.



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The exhibition continues in **Gallery 36** with a section dedicated to the artistic representation of the 'Vietnam War' or 'Second Indochina War' or 'American War', as it is variously called depending on the context (1955-1975). *Light and Belief. Voices and sketches of life from the Vietnam War*, 2012, by Vietnamese artist **Dinh Q. Lê** (Ha-Tien, 1968) who now lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), which was first shown at DOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel (2012). The artist fled South Vietnam in 1978 at 10 years old, after the capture of Saigon by North Vietnamese troops (1975) and the unification of the country in July 1976 and arrived in the United States among the "Boat People" in the late seventies. The installation brings together around 70 drawings made during the war by various Viet Cong and North Vietnamese artists around 1967-1973. The paintings of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers mostly represent a peaceful and idyllic world in the jungle, during the intervals between the fighting against the Americans and South Vietnamese. Accompanying these paintings is a video by Dinh Q. Lê composed from interviews with now aging Viet Cong and North Vietnamese artists to understand the life and work of soldier-artists during wartime and what motivated them to paint scenes of daily life, rather than of battle or violence. A work by **Vu Giang Huong** (Hanoi, 1930-2011), an important North Vietnamese artist, is also on display.

In the following **Gallery (36 bis)** the Ukrainian artist **Nikita Kadan** has created a new work in response to the War in Ukraine, which has continued since the Russian invasion of February 2022. This war extends the conflict already underway since 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and parts of the Donbas region of Ukraine. Kadan's large-scale installation *The Shelter II*, 2023 is a natural continuation of *The Shelter* created by the artist in 2015 for the 14th Istanbul Biennial and dedicated to the Donbas. The new large-scale work at Castello di Rivoli is inspired by images documenting the war in Ukraine found by the artist on the Internet. It expresses the drama and pain of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict and resembles a life-sized two-story bomb shelter. The upper space is a wall composed of stacks of books crammed against the glass of windows; books are no longer symbols of culture and knowledge but serve to protect the inhabitants and their homes from glass fragments in the event of explosions in conflict areas, as documented by the many war reports. The lower level of the installation recalls a place of death, an underground tomb. From the compact earth of the back wall emerges a hand in cast bronze from the artist's hand. The installation as a whole is charged with the tragedy of current history, transforming itself into an environment of solitude, silence, refuge, and melancholic impotence.

In **Gallery 37** an artistic reflection on the war in the Balkans (1990-2001) is presented through the video by **Anri Sala** (Tirana, 1974), *Nocturnes*, 1999, which uses documentary techniques of association between personal stories and historical realities to draw attention to the experience of loneliness and social pressure in times of war. The work interweaves the stories of two characters who suffer from insomnia for different reasons: a solitary fish collector, Jacques, who sees violence between fish as a metaphor for the violent and dark side of humans, and another young man, Denis, who suffers from insomnia after experiencing atrocities when he was a UN peacekeeper during wartime.

In an adjacent area, the conflicts in the Middle East (1948 - ongoing) are told through the film *The Ballad of Special Ops Cody*, 2017, by **Michael Rakowitz** (Long Island, New York, 1973), whose work investigates the contradictions of the wars in Iraq. In the film, made with the stop-motion animation technique, the protagonist - a toy model of an American soldier - confronts Mesopotamian votive statues preserved by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago and apologizes to them, taking responsibility for the crimes committed against the Iraqi population. Sergeant Gin McGill-Prather, former soldier of the 'Army National Guard, lends her voice to the toy soldier in the film. The toy soldier goes to the museum and uses his equipment to climb up into the museum vitrines where he talks to the statues and asks for pardon.

The exhibition ends in **Gallery 38 as well as in the evocative attic space** of the Museum with the echoes of the wars in Afghanistan which began in Fall 2001 with the US invasion of the country just after the Twin Towers Al Qaida terrorist attack, and the ensuing liberation of Afghanistan from the Taliban regime and establishment of a new Afghan government supported by the USA and allied forces until 2014. After 2014 a reduced foreign armed presence remained until summer 2021 when US and other foreign troops departed, followed by the immediate return of the Taliban to power.



Partner

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This ongoing conflict is narrated through the newly commissioned work by the Afghan artist **Rahraw Omarzad**, founder of the CCAA Center for Contemporary Art in Kabul and of an art school for women there. He fled Afghanistan in autumn 2021 with the aid of the Museum and the Italian Government, which granted him asylum. To make his new installation *Every Tiger Needs a Horse*, 2022-2023, which addresses the regenerative and therapeutic power of art, Omarzad created a controlled explosion, blowing up large canvases with a bomb made of dynamite and paint at a military base in Piedmont. The artist has placed the resulting large black and white paintings in the gallery. The work starts from the artist's analysis of his homeland, Afghanistan, scene of explosions and deaths and where the Taliban government has recently returned to take office. The black and white colors used by Omarzad in dynamiting the canvases recall its history, marked by constant power shifts, extremism and an ever-increasing climate of war and violence. His video *New Scenario*, 2022-23, made during the artist's residency at Castello di Rivoli after he was granted asylum, and filmed inside a 1943 air-raid shelter in Turin, reflects on the circularity of human destiny and the difficulty of freeing oneself from the logic of trauma, wound and conflict. The three channel video installation, exhibited in the darkened attic of the museum, shows symbolic, ghost-like characters guided by a score of slow movements and gestures, in a theatrical setting made up of props and contrasting lights which, together with the eerie repetitive soundtrack, create a hypnotic effect on the viewer. The protagonists of the video range from a representative of the Taliban, to an American soldier in Afghanistan; a businessman; a young European citizen and a North African man in traditional Sudanese dress. A man and two women wrapped in cloths appear in the background as mythological visions. The work alludes to the cyclical reversal of roles throughout history, where those in power lost and gained, over and over senselessly.

The exhibition concludes in the Museum **Theater** with a video program curated by the Ukrainian artist Nikita Kadan and curator Giulia Colletti entitled *A Letter from the Front*, with works by the contemporary Ukrainian artists **AntiGONNA** (Vinnitsa, 1986), **Yaroslav Futymsky** (Poninka, 1987), **Nikolay Karabinovych** (Odessa, 1988), **Dana Kavelina** (Melitopol, 1995), **Alina Kleytman** (Kharkiv, 1991), **Yuri Leiderman** (Odessa, 1963), **Katya Libkind** (Vladivostok, 1991), **Yarema Malashchuk & Roman Himey** (Yarema Malashchuk: Kolomyia, 1993 / Roman Himey: Kolomyia, 1992), **Lada Nakonechna** (Dnipropetrovsk, 1981), **R.E.P.** (2004), **Revkovsky / Rachinsky** (Daniil Revkovsky: Kharkiv, 1993 / Andriy Rachinsky: Kharkiv, 1990), **Oleksiy Sai** (Kiev, 1975), **Lesia Khomenko** (Kiev, 1980), and **Mykola Ridnyi** (Kharkiv, 1985).

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